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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ER](#) [SO](#)  
SUBJECT: ERITREA'S "INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK" FOR SOMALIA

REF: ASMARA 373

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Eritrea supposedly seeks a stable and peaceful Somalia, "even if it were on good terms with Ethiopia," according to Yemane Ghebreab, Eritrea's point man on Somalia and the ruling party's Director of Political Affairs. Eritrea proposes an inclusive framework of Somali groups leading to the creation of a government of national unity that excludes al-Shabaab's "radical fringe minority." Yemane asked to meet with the ambassador on October 26 (the meeting was delayed, as the ambassador was convoked by Foreign Minister Osman Saleh, reftel) and alluded to the need for Eritrea and the United States to work together, as "we can do some things you can't and vice versa." END SUMMARY.

12. (C) ERITREA'S ALLEGED AIMS AND APPROACH  
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Yemane Ghebreab remarked that Eritrea's objective is to promote a peaceful and stable Somalia, even if the resulting government were friendly to Ethiopia. Eritrea has no confidence that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is capable of governing Somalia and worries that ongoing conflict will strengthen the radicals of al-Shabaab, Yemane continued. The key, in Eritrea's view, is to bring together enough groups to create critical ruling mass while marginalizing the radical al-Shabaab leadership.

-- Even if Hizbul Islam (HI) and the TFG were to merge, Yemane opined, al-Shabaab would swiftly move to fill the void created in the Islamist wing of the political spectrum and paint HI members as apostates. Thus, to protect a TFG/HI coalition from al-Shabaab, Eritrea proposes an "inclusive framework" involving Somaliland, Puntland, the TFG, HI, the ASWJ, and others. He said al-Shabaab needs to be invited to participate in discussions but would certainly reject the offer, resulting in the self-isolation of the radical leadership and the loss of what little appeal the movement has among normal Somalis.

-- The process, as outlined by Yemane, would begin by a series of discussions with countries and Somali groups, perhaps later culminating in a conference or gathering in Somalia.

-- The ambassador responded with the array of reasons the USG sees the Djibouti process as the best mechanism for peace in

Somalia.

13. (C) ERITREA AND HIZBUL ISLAM  
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"We are in regular contact with Hizbul Islam," Yemane admitted. "But not me personally," he quickly added. He said Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt--in that order--have influence with Hizbul Islam. He commented that the recent fighting between HI and al-Shabaab over Kismaayo has "left the situation confused." In Yemane's view, al-Shabaab is on the verge of unraveling, as its radical leadership is out of step with Somali Islam and even with its own rank and file. "We have the knowledge and ability to do some things in Somalia you can't, while you have resources and capabilities we lack," Yemane said in what may have been a sidling offer of cooperation.

-- Yemane launched into an expansive recitation of Eritrea's Flat Denial. He claimed the "complete lack of any credible evidence" of Eritrea's support for Somali extremists was gradually taking root among informed observers. "It is ironic that there is talk of sanctioning us, for doing nothing, while nobody talks about sanctioning Ethiopia, which is still providing lots of weapons to Somali groups." He said Eritrea alone, despite its relationship with Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, could and would not move HI into a simple coalition with the TFG, due to HI's fears that al-Shabaab would attack politically on its "Islamist flank." Thus the need for the inclusive framework outlined above, in Eritrea's view.

14. (C) COMMENT: This is the closest any senior Eritrean official has come to allowing that Eritrea supports Hizbul Islam and opposes al-Shabaab, or at least its "radical fringe minority." (Whether true or not.) Eritrea's pursuit of its "inclusive framework" seems a complicated and risky approach aimed ultimately at getting Eritrea's favored group, Hizbul Islam, securely inside the tent while marginalizing al-Shabaab's radical leadership. Yemane rarely offers detailed Eritrean policy views on his own volition, usually preferring to counter-punch with rhetorical questions and generalizations. This unusual sharing of unsolicited Eritrean analysis and policy views, coming on the heels of the ambassador's meeting in which Foreign Minister Osman Saleh professed a desire for "continuous engagement" with the United States (reftel), may represent a coordinated Eritrean effort to keep the fast-closing bilateral window from slamming completely shut. END COMMENT.

McMULLEN